

THE EAST EUROPEAN REGIMES HAVE

brought great pressure to bear upon the urban technicians to go 665
to the villages to improve the technical facilities available for the 369 ●
farms; and simultaneously, strenuous efforts have been made to 463
strengthen the Party organization in the villages. "The situation cannot be tolerated," complained the Hungarian Party organ, *Szabad Nep* in December 1953, "in which skilled and well-educated agricultural experts work in agriculture only in small numbers, and the greater part is engaged in administrative work."²⁶

The administrative weakness of the State in the countryside was also evident from the inferior quality of the personnel employed in rural posts. "Not one of the managers of the Machine and Tractor Stations," the Czechoslovak Minister of Agriculture, Jindrich Uher, revealed, "has a higher-school education and only 3.5 per cent have had a secondary education." Moreover, only 10 per cent of the senior agronomists at the MTS had a higher education, and only three per cent of the State Farm workers had completed work at technical schools.²⁷ Such were conditions in the most modernized of the Satellite nations; undoubtedly, they were much worse elsewhere.

In Poland, for example, an official analysis, based on "incomplete data," revealed that in its 402 Machine and Tractor Stations there were 76 directors, 72 political leaders, 101 senior agronomists, and 101 senior mechanics who had no qualifications for their jobs whatsoever!²⁸ No doubt it was this wretched situation which explains the recent feverish efforts of the Polish Government to train vast numbers of agricultural experts for immediate service as part of its New Course for Agriculture.

But even if the Communists succeed in increasing the output of farm technicians, two serious problems inherent in the system remain. First of all, there is the tendency of these technicians to attach themselves to the central ministerial apparatus from which so much wealth and prestige is derived in the totalitarian state. Secondly, the technicians who have been dispatched to the countryside are burdened with a host of responsibilities unrelated to the task for which they were trained — that is, the endless paper work of Communist bureaucracy. Resolutions, orders, decrees, receipts, dossiers follow each other in an endless succession, requiring immense expenditure of time and effort, and multiplying as the farm

²⁶ *Szabad Nep* (Budapest), December 4, 1953.

²⁷ *Rude Právo* (Prague), December 19, 1953.

²⁸ *Nowe Drogi* (Warsaw), January, 1954, p. 73.

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463 apparatus grows. When the introduction of the New Course in 1953 made agricultural improvement imperative, the seriousness of this bureaucratic delay and confusion became the subject of frequent attack by Communist orators, confirming the judgment of a prominent American student of Communist agricultural life who wrote:

When you read . . . of the remarkable increase in the number of agronomists and other agricultural specialists and technicians in the Soviet Union, remember that many of them are not engaged, or do not spend much of their time, in research or extension or other technical work, but are trying to cope with the vast amount of bureaucratic paper work required by the Soviet system.²⁹

The recurrent drives to "deflate the ranks of the farm bureaucracy" have not generally, according to this same expert, proved successful.

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241 An additional measure of the long-standing Communist reluctance to divert national resources to agricultural development is to be found in the relatively lethargic pace of farm mechanization. While it is true (see Table 23) that an increase in the mechanization of the "Socialist sector" did accompany collectivization, the increase was by no means as great as popularly pictured, and was not even as great, proportionally, as the increase which accompanied Soviet collectivization in the early thirties. Since one of the stock justifications of large-scale collectivized farming was, and remains, its alleged capacity to exploit modern farm machinery, the failure of the Communists to supply the farms with adequate machinery indicated the degree to which this Communist argument was a rationalization for a policy of exploitation.

Since the broad Russian plains are more adaptable to use of farm machinery, especially large tractors and combines, comparisons with Eastern Europe and its more broken terrain are not altogether apt. However, it should be noted that the Soviet Union provides a higher proportion of tractors to its farms than do the East European Communist regimes. As indicated in Table 23, there were approximately 107,500 tractors in service in Eastern Europe in 1952-53, compared with approximately 45,000 four years earlier. During the four years of collectivization, then, the tractor park in Eastern Europe was increased by only 62,500. In the USSR, on the other hand, over 100,000 tractors were produced in the year 1936 alone,³⁰ far fewer than was needed, but far greater proportionately than in Eastern Europe.

²⁹ Lasser Volin, "Russia's Agricultural Potential," *Foreign Agriculture*, October, 1953, p. 179.

³⁰ Harry Schwartz, p. 243.

795 Greek Orthodox Church, which though united in its Uniate form with Rome, preserved its old language and customs. This Church became the target of special Russian propagandistic and repressive efforts as soon as the Iron Curtain was established.

565 Elsewhere outside the former realm of the Habsburgs the
795 situation was comparable. In Poland a Catholic peasantry
● 369 whose loyalty was deeply moving lived confidently though primitively in the light of a mystical faith, while worldliness and skepticism were prevalent among the upper classes. It was commonly said there, after World War I, that the most religious of peoples was governed by the most morally lax of bureaucrats; and that may well have been the case. Nor could the coming of industrialism to such mushroom cities as Lodz, so bitterly lamented by Ladislas Reymont, bring about the immediate solution of any grave social problem. Nevertheless, as we shall see, there existed in Poland religious elites of extraordinary quality and dedication. In eastern Germany, overwhelmingly Protestant despite certain vigorous centers of Catholic activity such as the Ermland in East Prussia and the border districts west of Poznan (Silesia was a province apart, its culture having been developed under the Habsburgs), one could go from the old conservative, rural Church communities of the landed estates along the Baltic Sea to the liberal atmosphere of Saxony, where the social problems inherent in modern industrial society dominated thought and action. Concerning the Balkans one need say here only that, though they suffered from the normal diseases of feudalism, they offered much of vital and absorbing interest to the student of religious life.

175 These observations will help to explain the situation which
186 followed the First World War. The old Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved, and dissident nationalist sentiment, supported by the will of the victorious Allies, demanded the crea-

out of the 8,000 workers are Party members, only 780 read the Party newspaper. (*For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy!* 15th October, 1948). Thus a large number of workers are merely nominal members of the Party. 466

The large-scale 'purges' in the Parties also express the increasing hostility between the leaders and their 'supporters'. In the 'purge' in Hungary nearly half a million members were expelled from the Party. In Czechoslovakia, there was a 'purge' of a quarter of a million members in 1948 and the first half of 1949. In Rumania, 'over 192,000 hostile elements', that is, over a fifth of the total membership of the Party, were 'purged' between November, 1948, and May, 1950. In Bulgaria, 92,500 members and candidates, out of a total of 442,183, were expelled from the Party between June, 1949 and June, 1950. 468

While the workers within the 'People's Democracies' cannot express their dissatisfaction through the police-controlled plebiscites, miscalled general elections, those on the other side of the frontier, who are close enough to know the reality of the regime inside the 'People's Democracies', and free enough to express their opinion of it—as in Austria and Berlin—have decisively shown their disapproval.

The Expropriation of the Peasantry

The parvenu ruling class in Eastern Europe, in order to add 369 ● to its wealth and comfort, devotes all its energy to increasing the number of workers employed in state industries. Hence it comes into conflict with the masses of the peasantry.

As has been pointed out, the progress of agriculture in the Eastern European countries depends on their industrialisation. Their inherited backwardness, their separation from Western Europe by the division of the Continent into two spheres of influence, Russian imperialist exploitation, the greed of the local bureaucracy—all these factors impede the accumulation of capital, necessary for industrialisation. Had industry already existed on a big scale, the countryside would voluntarily have supplied agricultural products to the urban population in exchange for industrial products, and would also have supplied the necessary labour power for industry, as the surplus population would have been attracted to the towns by their higher

- 369 standard of life and culture. Conversely, if the village supplied the agricultural products and labour necessary for the towns, industrialisation would have been much accelerated. These two conditions are mutually dependent. But the bureaucracy cannot tolerate a gradual development of agriculture and industry, and prefers to try to escape from the vicious circle by forced 'collectivisation'.

423 All previous land reforms had, for a number of years at
 474 least, the effect not only of not increasing the agricultural surpluses available for the towns, but actually of reducing them. This is because large estates, based either on tenants' or workers' labour, obviously have relatively larger surpluses than the small peasant farms, even if both have the same productivity. Land reform, by dividing the large estates into many small peasant farms has, as an immediate consequence, a decline in the marketable agricultural surpluses. The surpluses necessary for industrialisation could be obtained by the encouragement of *kulak* farming, but this would be unwise from the standpoint of the bureaucracy, as socially and politically it would raise a new ruling class clinging tenaciously to private property, and economically it would lead to a demand by the kulaks for industrial goods in exchange for their surpluses. The bureaucracy needs a cheaper way of getting this surplus. It might have recourse to taxation and requisitions. But this too can hardly be relied on to provide large enough quantities of agricultural products for quick industrialisation, for the disgruntled peasant can 'go on strike' and decrease his sowing area, or neglect his fields, so that the surplus available for requisition decreases, or he can hide part of his yield, for it is impossible to supervise millions of small peasants scattered in thousands of villages. These drawbacks are virtually eliminated and the obligatory deliveries much more easily secured if millions of peasants are concentrated in some tens of thousands of large farms. The peasants, it is true, may react to their expropriation and herding in semi-serf camps by slaughtering their livestock. This may reduce the total agricultural production for a number of years and famine may stalk the land bringing death in its train, but no matter. If the quantity of agricultural goods in the hands of the state increases, everything is satisfactory. 'Collectivisation' also enables the state

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Land Reform and Agricultural Improvement

LADISLAV FEIERABEND

I

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369 Eastern Europe was overwhelmingly peasant between the two world wars. The peasantry, for whom land was not merely a means of production or of income, but the established basis of family life, formed the majority of the population. The main problem of this region was rural overpopulation. In the period before the First World War, the surplus young people emigrated in considerable numbers to the United States and to other overseas countries. After 1918 this outlet was closed, and everybody had to remain on his home soil. There was too little land for too many people: roughly twice as many people were living off the land as was the case in Western Europe.

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241 Everybody wanted land and therefore the price was enormously high. After money was spent to buy the land, there was not enough left to buy the numbers of cattle that the holding could support or to improve farming techniques. Lack of capital was responsible for the fact that farming methods remained the same as they had been for fifty or more years. The yields were very low, and there was no possibility of increasing them. In fact, yields decreased be-

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439 been, considering the size and population of these countries. Although they comprised roughly 25 per cent of Europe's area and population, excluding the European part of the Soviet Union, they handled no more than 10 or 11 per cent of Europe's exports and imports. About one third of the trade of the Eastern European area was purely regional. With the exception of Albania which traded mainly with Italy, Eastern Europe's trade list was headed by Germany, followed by the competing states of Austria, Great Britain, and the United States. The predominance of Germany became even greater during the war years. Trade was one of Germany's most important means of influencing the political, social, and cultural life of this region.

II

178 By 1918 the countries of Eastern Europe had reached different stages of social evolution. In Poland and Hungary the aristocracy had preserved considerable power in spite of a rising intellectual bourgeoisie. In Rumania and Croatia the power of the aristocracy had been wiped out by the land reforms and leadership had been taken over by a commercial middle class. In Czechoslovakia a strong bureaucratic and commercial element had risen to leadership. In the Baltic states, also, it was mainly the commercial class which had ascended to leading positions. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania had no aristocracy and only a small intellectual bourgeoisie and commercial class.

● 369 It was generally from the rural stratum of village teachers, priests, station masters, and notaries that the new bourgeoisie and the ruling class arose. The children of an educated father, who was able to secure a better place in society, had a better chance of entering a university—the sanctuary as much of social position and status as of knowledge. However, those who succeeded in obtaining graduate and other degrees in

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fields such as law, medicine, engineering, or economics often renounced their humble origin and were happy to be absorbed into the urban population. Even the newly formed commercial class preferred to stay in the cities. As a result, the urban population increased steadily and towns grew rapidly. 369 ●

Urbanization advanced with the growth of industry. An illustration of this is offered by the growth in population of six industrial cities in each of the following countries: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. The total population of these cities rose from six and one-half million to ten million between the two world wars. The pace of industrialization was most rapid in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Poland, where the aforementioned cities almost doubled their urban population. In the other three countries (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania), the population in these cities increased by approximately 30 per cent. Striking examples of how industrialization and transportation attracted people to cities are given by Katowice, a coal and heavy industry center in Silesia, whose population rose from forty-five to one hundred and thirty-three thousand, and by Gdynia, Poland's Baltic port, whose population rose from three to one hundred and fourteen thousand between the wars. 369 162

The regional distribution of industrial population was not uniform. Around 1930, 90 per cent of Czechoslovakia's industrial population lived in the Czecho-Moravian district. Poland's industrial population concentrated around Warsaw, Lodz, and the Silesian coal basin. In Hungary, 41 per cent of the people earning their livings in industrial occupations were concentrated in Budapest. In Yugoslavia, 63 per cent of the industrial wage earners lived in Croatia and in the regions that had previously been Hungarian. In Rumania, 25 per cent of the industrial population lived in Transylvania and 28 per cent in Muntenia. Only Bulgaria's industrial pop-

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- ulation showed any tendency toward decentralization, with 30 per cent of her total industrial population living in the district of Sofia.

The industrial population of these countries was occupied as follows: 25 to 30 per cent in the textile and clothing industries; 18 to 21 per cent in heavy and metallurgy industries; 11 to 22 per cent in the food industry; and 7 to 17 per cent in the lumber industry. A variation in industrial goods and in producing plants was found only in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, in southern Poland and Transylvania, and in the areas of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

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- One of the major problems facing the new governments in their industrialization programs was to equate the growth of the industrial working populations with improvement in industrial working and social conditions. Social legislation in the interwar period attained considerable progress in this direction. Prior to 1914 there already existed in Eastern Europe various social insurance and pension plans, and these were expanded between 1919 and 1939. Compulsory workers' accident and health insurance plans were introduced whereby both employers and wage earners contributed to a central fund to provide coverage for accident, illness, maternity, disability, old age, death, and unemployment. Generally speaking, the working day was reduced to eight hours, with a maximum forty-eight hour week, and the age minimum for child and woman labor was fixed at fourteen years or, in the case of heavy and dangerous work, such as mining, at sixteen to eighteen years. However, rigid application of these measures was far from universal.

A notable innovation was the establishment by the agrarian regime in Bulgaria of a compulsory labor service for the development of public works in place of the traditional military service which had been prohibited by the peace treaty. Expenditures in 1937 for social services for the entire region averaged 3 per cent of the estimated national in-

come. Once again, Czechoslovakia headed the list with 5.5 ⁴⁶⁶ per cent while the Balkan countries devoted only 1.5 per cent ⁷⁴⁵ of their national income to social services. In the same year ¹⁸⁵ the number of persons registered as unemployed in the various countries was as follows: Czechoslovakia, 408,000; Poland, 347,000; Hungary, 47,000; Yugoslavia, 21,600; and Rumania, 10,800.

A major consequence of industrialization and urbanization was the rapid growth both of an urban proletariat and of the bureaucracy. Those people who had been separated from their ancestral rural surroundings and traditions and often from the influence of their families became increasingly detached from spiritual matters and turned more and more towards materialistic and technical spheres. The number of bureaucrats grew rapidly and this resulted in political favoritism and in desk-level programs which very seldom touched the people of the countryside. ^{369 ●} ⁵⁶⁵

It cannot be said, however, that no progress was made or that standards of living were consistently low. It must be remembered that it was not until the First World War that many of these countries attained independence. A part of Poland had just emerged from Russian domination and certain areas of the Balkan states had just freed themselves from Ottoman rule. Even Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, and parts of Poland had been freed only recently from Austro-German political and economic controls. Under these circumstances, the progress made by these countries, notwithstanding failures and mistakes, was considerable indeed. ¹⁸⁵

III

The states that had dominated this region before the First World War—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman empire—showed little interest in improving the educational standards of the large masses in Eastern Europe. ⁸⁷¹ ²¹²

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185 with the Soviet master plans. The captive nations were al-
433 lowed to preserve the external attributes of sovereignty and
their governments were granted an advisory voice in the
preparation of these national plans. But the supreme control
of the plans remained in the hands of Moscow, and their
primary goal was, and is, rapid industrialization.

II

178 The possibilities of industrialization in Eastern Europe
are considerable, but obviously not unlimited. They depend
on the availability of manpower and its technical know-how,
on industrial raw materials and machinery, on capital needed
for investments, and on markets capable of absorbing the
products of the new industries.

464 Before the last war, five million persons were employed
in the mining and in the medium and large manufacturing
industries of the six major countries of the area. Today this
number exceeds nine million. There is a shortage of labor,
both skilled and unskilled, in Eastern Germany and in the
Czech part of Czechoslovakia. The reserves of manpower—
land laborers, dwarf-farm owners, and married women—are
limited in Hungary and the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia,
large in Poland, and even larger in Rumania and in the three
Balkan countries. The areas where labor is short coincide to
a large degree with those of low natural increase of popula-
tion, and vice versa. In the first period of reconstruction after
the war, there was in many parts of the area a movement of
the population from the villages to the towns in search of
urban, not necessarily industrial, employment. For instance,
in Poland alone, two and one-half million persons moved
into towns during the first seven postwar years. This move-
ment is now over, as well as the postwar enthusiasm for re-
construction, and the governments have to recruit new work-
ers by propaganda and sometimes by half-coercion. Unless

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living conditions improve considerably in the cities, the governments will have difficulty in procuring the hundreds of thousands of new industrial workers they require annually. 166 369 • 464
However, manpower is still one of the principal assets of the captive countries.

The quality of this manpower is, generally speaking, better than is assumed in the West. First, there is a considerable industrial tradition, which goes back to the Middle Ages, in Saxony, Bohemia, and southern Poland. Second, the average intelligence of the people is fairly high; given time and education an average village boy or girl can become a skilled worker and, in many cases, a qualified technician, although of course such students lack the always evident association of American youth with motor vehicles and other machinery.

It might be interesting to quote here a relevant passage 000 from the report of the mission of the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization, which was composed mostly of American experts, after its return from Poland in 1948:

It is the opinion of the Mission that if the Polish nation had an opportunity to be educated according to the standards of western Europe and to carry out a peaceful economic development, the world would be amazed by the result. Imperfectly developed resources of intelligence constitute the greatest potential wealth of the Polish people. It is a raw material of far greater value than [Polish] coal . . .¹

Assuming that this is a sound judgment, there is no reason to doubt that it applies also to the other countries of this region.

The number of graduate engineers, chemists, and scientists in Eastern Europe declined greatly during the last war and during the postwar flight to the West, but is now increasing rapidly. The joint know-how of such technicians should not be underestimated, especially when Russian technical experience is added to it. Technical inventions and improve- 463

¹ Report of the FAO Mission for Poland (Washington, 1948), p. 18.

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commodities, such as kitchen equipment and furniture, are 362
rare and expensive, above the means of an average family,
and modern house appliances are hardly known at all. A
private car is an extreme rarity and will remain so within
the foreseeable future since few passenger cars are being
manufactured and almost none imported.

As far as food is concerned, there is much truth in the 362
Communist assertion that with the rapid increase of city [369] ●
populations the production of foodstuffs lags behind the
growing demand. Figures for food production in this area
do not indicate the amount of consumption, since much of
the food produced is stocked as army and war reserve or ex-
ported to Russia and China. The true situation is that while
there is no actual hunger most of the population is fed at
standards far below those of Western Europe. The diet is
monotonous, consisting largely of bread, noodles, cereals,
potatoes, common vegetables, and puddings, to judge from
advice given to housewives by women's publications. Pro-
tective foods are fewer than before the war though probably
more evenly distributed. Before the war, in the poorer parts
of the area, the urban unemployed and millions of so-called
dwarf-sized farm holders were as a rule underfed. Today
the unemployed have disappeared, but the inmates of the
labor camps are starving, and the poor peasants are no better
off than before. The families living on middle-sized farms
consume more food than before the war, because an incen-
tive for selling produce is lacking.

The caloric value of foodstuffs consumed by the working
population in the cities has, if anything, decreased. At home,
families eat what the British used to eat a few years ago,
but they have less of it. The quality of food consumed in the
public eating places maintained by factories and the like is
described as extremely bad, and so is the service. Standing
in food lines, often in vain, consumes a large part of the
housewife's time. This, added to the difficulty of cooking be-

178 never in the last century have so many people worked so hard
433 for such meager rewards. However, in the social field, the extension of social services and of technical education can be credited to the Communist regimes. In the economic field, although the tax on the people has been almost unimaginably great, it must be admitted that the badly needed industrial development of formerly rural areas of Eastern Europe is due to the Communists.

178 The latter point needs clarification. The Wilsonian East-
433 ern Europe of 1918 inherited from Austria-Hungary, im-
369 perial Russia, and the old primitive Balkans an obsolete social structure of rural overpopulation and poverty due to insufficient industrial and urban development. The Czech lands, Polish Silesia, and a few lesser industrial regions were exceptions to the general structure of the area. Left to themselves by the indifferent West, having undergone the shock of the depression as only rural states can suffer it, the free nations of the area, again with the exception of Czechoslovakia, could in the interwar period neither solve their grave social problems nor defend themselves in the hour of danger. The existence of a poor and defenseless group of nations in the heart of Europe surrounded on East and West by two highly industrialized powers was an anachronism and an indirect invitation to aggression. After the disintegration of Eastern Europe between 1938 and 1941, the causes of this disaster were examined by thinkers of many nations, and many of them came to the conclusion that the disaster was inevitable not only because of the political disunity of this area but also because of its economic and productive inferiority. Rural societies had no chance of survival in the heavily armed world of the late '30's if only because they were unable to produce the weapons with which they could have deterred aggression effectively. The awareness of this fact has deeply influenced the political thinking of the nations concerned. It is inevitable that the Poles, to take but one example, should

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reflect that, had their country had a sufficient industrial basis 178
in 1939 to equip ten armored divisions for which she had 433
enough trained manpower, her loss of independence and 369 •
many other events in modern history could have been prevented.

The present industrialization of Eastern Europe is gradually 178
eliminating this handicap of the past. To be sure, the 661
increase of the industrial potential of these countries lies in 185-
the interest of the Soviet Union in its own military preparations 649
The men in the Kremlin may dispose as they wish of
this area's industrial plants together with all its human and
material resources with the single exception of the spirit of
its peoples. From the standpoint of both the immediate and
long-range interests of the West, any addition to the wealth
or the strength of Eastern Europe is unwelcome so long as
the latter remains a part of the Soviet bloc. These countries
are of course aware of this situation, but they have to think
also about their future. They hope that one day the Iron
Curtain will be lifted and they know that at that time they
will need all their new industrial wealth in order to cease
being an area of social unrest and a target for exploitation
by powerful neighbors as well as a hotbed for world wars.
Nobody has disputed the right of Russia to evolve into an
industrial power. No one can expect the countries of Eastern
Europe to relinquish their hopes of freedom and their rights
to prosperity which, in the light of their past, are linked to
the modernization of their economic structure. Wendell Will-
kie said during the last war that "Only the productive can
be strong, and only the strong can be free." His words apply
to all nations alike. The nations of Eastern Europe are poten-
tial allies of the West. Those who earnestly desire a better
world should bear in mind that the lasting interests of these
friendly nations transcend their temporary position as Rus-
sia's enforced associates.